



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

XXXV. GOETHE AND THE KU-KLUX KLAN

In 1799, at the very threshold of his literary career, Walter Scott published a translation of Goethe's *Goetz von Berlichingen*, containing the single short scene devoted to the judges of the *Vehmgericht*, who are discovered in "a narrow vault dimly illuminated, . . . all muffled in black cloaks." This translation had no second edition, nor is there evidence that it was known in our southern states.

It was almost at the close of his long career, namely in 1828-1829, that Scott wrote the novel, *Anne of Geierstein*—accounted one of his least inspired performances. Of direct significance for our argument is Scott's comment, in his introduction to the second edition (1831), that he had touched at some length in the narrative upon "the *Vehm* tribunals of Westphalia, a name so awful in men's ears during many centuries, and which, through the genius of Goethe, has again been revived in public fancy with a full share of its ancient terrors." This introduction also contains a long and thrilling treatise on the *Vehmgericht*, taken from Francis Palgrave.

In the seventeenth chapter of the first part of the novel, Scott mentions the "strongholds of that Robber-chivalry . . . of whom, since Goethe, an author born to arouse the slumbering fame of his country, has dramatized the story of Goetz of Berlichingen, we have so many spirit-stirring tales."

The actual episode of the Secret Tribunal in *Anne of Geierstein* makes the second chapter of Book II: Philipson, after a restless hour in bed, finds his pallet sinking into a dark subterranean vault (corresponding to "a narrow vault, dimly illuminated" in Scott's translation of *Goetz*); lights are carried by men "muffled in black cloaks" ("muffled in black cloaks" in *Goetz*), wearing their cowls drawn over their

heads, so as to conceal their features. He learns that he is in the presence of the "celebrated Judges of the Secret Tribunal" ("Judges of the Secret Tribunal" occurs three times in the scene in *Goetz*); a "coil of ropes and a naked sword" ("cord and steel," six times in *Goetz*) play a part more than once.

The president addresses the assembly "as men who judge in secret and punish in secret, like the Deity" ("ye that judge in secret and avenge in secret like the Deity" occurs twice in *Goetz*).

William E. Dodd, in his recent work "The Cotton Kingdom," observes:

To men whose interests were those of masters of slaves, and whose philosophy was the doctrine of social caste and prescriptive rights, it was but natural that Walter Scott's famous novels should make appeal. One New York publisher said he sent Scott's works South in carload lots. . . . Before 1850 it was good form for Southern gentlemen to place Sir Walter Scott's novels on their library shelves, and for all Southern boys and girls to read these books as the great models of life and good breeding. Few men ever had a greater influence over the cotton-planters than the beloved Scottish bard and novelist.

Elsewhere Mr. Dodd adds:

Walter Scott's romanticism and hero-worship suited their taste and braced their social system, . . . and he furnished matter enough for the longest of the idle days of a lonely cotton plantation.

Mark Twain, whose keen insight demands respect, even when finding expression in rather drastic terms, remarks (in *Life on the Mississippi*):

Whereas crowned heads in Europe were gods before [Bonaparte], they are only men since then. . . . Then comes Sir Walter Scott with his enchantments, and by his single might . . . sets the world in love with dreams and phantoms. . . . He did measureless harm; more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote. Most of the world has now outlived good part of these harms, though by no means all of them; but in our South they flourish pretty forcefully still. But for the Sir Walter Scott disease, the character of the Southerner—or Southron, according to Sir Walter's starchier way of phrasing it—would be wholly modern, in place of modern and mediaeval mixed, and the South would be fully a

generation further advanced than it is. . . . It was he that created rank and caste down there, and also reverence for rank and caste, and pride and pleasure in them. . . . Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war.

That local devotees of Scott did not balk at accepting the ill-starred *Anne* at par value, may be gathered from a review of this novel, in the *Southern Review* of Charleston, at the time of its appearance:

We congratulate the reading public on the pleasure they have shared with us; . . . we find truer gratification in the enjoyment of such exquisite fare, as is here presented, than in the indulgence of any morbid critical appetite whatever. . . . The courage and generosity of the high-toned cavalier are again shown forth in the scene of Arthur's duel with Donnerhugel amidst the ruins of the old castle of Geierstein. . . . We have heard it surmised that our author would exhaust himself; . . . we have never participated in this fear. . . . Like an experienced general, he skilfully reconnoitres the ground, and seizes on every 'coin of vantage' that lies in the direction of his march; . . . he touches a trap, and initiates you into all the fearful mysteries and appalling rites of the 'Secret Tribunal.'

This extended rhapsody closes with further allusions to the "Secret Tribunal."

The fundamental history of the origins of the Ku-Klux Klan is by Lester and Wilson, edited by Fleming (1905). Captain Lester, the first author, and one of the actual founders of the clan, was a lawyer, an official in the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and later a member of the Tennessee legislature. The Rev. D. L. Wilson was a Presbyterian pastor; the editor is Professor of History in Vanderbilt University.

The society was founded in May, 1866, in the office of a prominent lawyer of Pulaski, Tennessee, a town of unusual cultivation; the organizers were young college-men, looking for some harmless diversion in the dreary days following the Civil War. The bookish quality of the founders reveals itself not merely in the fact that every page of the first printed constitution was bordered with Latin quotations, but in the name itself, which, it is agreed, is derived from κύκλος,

"circle." The meetings were held in a dilapidated empty house on the borders of the town. Pulaski is in the region of the Scotch immigration: the names of the first clan-leaders, Wilson, Lester, Pike, Jones, Crowe, Kennedy, Reed, McCord, are not without suggestion.

One needs no overstrung imagination to understand the appeal which passages like the following, in *Anne of Geierstein*, might make to high-spirited Southerners, facing the collapse of their traditional institutions:

Such an institution could only prevail at a time when the ordinary means of justice were excluded by the hand of power, and when, in order to bring the guilty to punishment, it required all the influence and authority of such a confederacy. In no other country than one exposed to every species of feudal tyranny, and deprived of every ordinary mode of obtaining justice or redress, could such a system have taken root and flourished. . . . The Vehmic Tribunals can only be considered as the original jurisdictions . . . which survived the subjugation of their country.

In Dixon's *Clansman*, which is based upon much study of Ku-Klux history, are various features which betray the direct working of Walter Scott: in Book Four the "fiery cross" is sent around to summon the clans. Even at the present moment, when this edifying association is being systematically revived, the emblem plays a notable part: in December, 1921, Oklahoma members of the Ku-Klux Klan appeared, in disguise, at the funeral of a Tulsa policeman, bearing "a flaming cross of red roses." Mr. Dixon emphasizes more than once the Scotch-Irish ancestry of his night-riders. Thought-provoking is also the form of Mr. Dixon's statement that the accused was tried by "secret tribunal"—the identical term used continually by Scott in translating and imitating Goethe.

Of specific borrowings it is not easy to adduce much proof: the phrase, "trying the culprit by his peers," in Scott's novel, is not unlike "to protect the people from trial except by their peers" in the Nashville Constitution of the Invisible Empire, May 1867. In Tennessee, we are informed (Lester and Wilson, 107), several members of the Klan were exe-

cuted by its orders, "for committing evil deeds in the name of the Klan," which seems like an application of Scott's statement: "unworthy members were expelled, or sustained a severe punishment." The terrible penalty for revealing secrets, mentioned in *Anne of Geierstein*, is comparable to the Nashville obligation of the Invisible Empire,¹ "Any member divulging, or causing to be divulged, any of the foregoing obligations, shall meet the fearful penalty and traitor's doom, which is Death! Death! Death!" The designation "dens" for the lodges of the order corresponds very well with the subterraneousness of the tribunal in Scott's novel. In Scott's translation of Goethe, as well as in *Anne of Geierstein*, the members of the court are all "muffled in black cloaks." It is true that the Rev. Thomas Dixon has put white robes upon the Clansmen (in more senses than one), and doubtless his "cheap unbleached domestic" corresponds to the facts in certain regions, but the costumes of the Klan were usually black.

The full official title of the Klan, adopted in Nashville, May 1867, "Ku-Klux Klan or Invisible Empire," is strikingly near the "Invisible Tribunal" in *Anne of Geierstein*. In Fleming's introduction to *Lester and Wilson* is found, as might be expected in the work of a learned professional historian, an explicit suggestion that the *Vehmgericht* of Germany "may well have served as an example of secret association for self-defence," but there is no hint at the plausible mediation of Sir Walter Scott.

The Ku-Klux organization, at the beginning, doubtless combined elements from the history of the crusades, freemasonry, college fraternity pranks, and classical masquerades, but it seems reasonable to hold that the underlying formative influence was that derived, by way of Scott, from Goethe's *Goetz von Berlichingen*, Act V, scene xi.

JAMES TAFT HATFIELD

¹ Report of the Committee on Affairs in the late Insurrectionary States, II, p. 48.